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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Tango! gives Huntsville teen a voice**

HUNTSVILLE – Jared Merrill was ready for his brother's return.

For more than six months, he practiced using the augmentative communication device, called a Tango!, provided to him by Children's Rehabilitation Service ( CRS ). He prepared a message for his older brother, Thomas, who was returning home from a two-year mission trip to Germany.

Seventeen-year-old Jared has cerebral palsy, an anoxic brain injury, and spastic quadriplegia. Unable to speak, he wanted to surprise his brother with his new method of communication.

When Thomas arrived at the Huntsville airport, everyone was excited to see him. Jared, in the meantime, calmly reached for the Tango! switch so he could deliver a message to his sibling.

"Welcome home, Thomas. I'm so happy to see you. I love you, Thomas. Can I have a hug? Let's get your luggage," the message read.

There wasn't a dry eye in the family, as Jared easily used the Tango!, said Shelley Merrill, Jared and Thomas' mother.

"Thomas was stunned that Jared was able to speak to him," she said. "We'd kept the whole thing a secret."

The Tango! was the first communication device Jared was able to use, his mother said. It uses regular language and whole phrases, making it easier for the young man to communicate.

Merrill said she is grateful to the Huntsville CRS office for introducing Jared to the Tango!.

"They've been tireless in trying to find a device he could use," Shelley said. "I can't say enough about their diligence and determination."

Jared uses his Tango! wherever he goes – whether church, school, or home. The device allows the teen-ager to express exactly what he needs and wants. Before, when he couldn't speak, his mother had to guess what he wanted, she said.

"This has opened up a new world for him," Shelley said. "For me, seeing my child with a way to communicate has been a tremendous blessing."

Children's Rehabilitation Service is a program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, the state agency whose mission is to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.